

## Clare Castle Country Park (November 2013)

All the Trustees-elect have been putting in a considerable amount of time in planning for the running of the Park. I would like to thank them for their commitment and hard work.

The following summarises some of the matters with which we have been dealing.

**New Cut** We have continued to put pressure on the Environment Agency to resolve the matter. (In the last month an average of 5 telephone calls a week have been made to them). At the end of October a constructive meeting with them was held on the river bank. When looking at the practical construction issues two main difficulties became apparent. At the meeting the Environment Agency's two engineers gathered enough information to enable them to produce engineering drawings and rough costings which would enable us to consider how any problems could be overcome; these drawings were received last week and a further meeting with them was held on 26<sup>th</sup> November (attended by two engineers and two environmental people from the Environment Agency). At this meeting it appeared that both the structural and the environmental problems that had come up in October could be resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

As I mentioned in my update of 17<sup>th</sup> October it will not be possible to confirm a final solution until the Environment Agency have completed their flood modelling exercise. (Regulations require that checks have to be made on flood risk when a new structure is built in a river). It will also be necessary to obtain from the Environment Agency formal approval for the new structure (which will take two months), and planning approval will also be needed from St Edmundsbury. It is therefore unlikely that the work could be completed before the Spring.

**Transfer of the Park from Suffolk County Council.** In the Park newsletter, circulated with Chevron in early September, I said it looked as though the transfer of the Park would not take place until around the end of this year. It turns out that that prediction was far too optimistic. The speed at which Suffolk County Council progresses matters has to be experienced to be believed - and even then it defies understanding; if the Park is transferred before 31<sup>st</sup> March I would now be pleasantly surprised.

**Renovation of the buildings.** Design and property consultants, Concertus, have made good progress on the pre-construction work that will be needed on the buildings. e.g. drawing up detailed specifications, applying for necessary planning etc. approvals. This work is being carried out at no cost to the Town Council or the Trust that will manage the Park. But of course, no actual building work can be started until the Park is transferred.

**Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant.** On behalf of the Trustees-elect, and with them, the Town Council applied for an HLF 'start-up grant'. This somewhat convoluted process was necessary as at present no Trust exists that can apply for such a grant. We are delighted to say that the application for the maximum sum for this type of grant (£10,000) was successful. This will enable us to draw on the extensive experience of six specialists in Ancient Monuments, environmental heritage projects, parks, museums, 'visitor experiences' and 'learning, outreach and activity planning'.

This project has been set up to achieve two main objectives:

1. To consider what the Park might look like in 25-50 years, and what the primary focus should be in the next 5 years.
2. To develop the understanding of the Trustees-elect, and others who have been working closely on the draft plans, so they will be better able to protect and 'manage' the Park.

The fact the HLF have awarded a grant means that they believe these objectives are both sound and robust.

**Future plans.** It is clear that apart from renovating the buildings, substantial expenditure will need to be incurred if the Park is to become a 'beacon of excellence'. We therefore intend to apply for a major HLF grant during 2014. On completion of the HLF 'start-up' project we will be in a position to outline what might be included in such an application.

To allay the fears of those who would, rightly, be concerned if our plans were to change the Park dramatically, it might be worth quoting our 'vision', namely

*"To have a real country park that will be an example to which others can only aspire, where people can relax and enjoy themselves in peaceful surroundings, and where they can make the most of the historical and environmental learning opportunities in Clare"*

**Trustees-elect.** Derek Blake was intending to stand down as a Trustee within six months of the Park being acquired. In the light of our intention to apply for a major HLF grant, and his particular experience in that area, together with his wider abilities, he has agreed to continue as a Trustee for a longer period than originally envisaged. I am delighted he has made this decision as he will be a great asset to the Trust.

**Halloween.** Margaret Godwin, Robin Stone and Gayle Mallows organised and, with many helpers, ran a very successful 'Pumpkins in the Park' Halloween event. Around 300 people, many in fancy dress, took part.

Following a map around the paths and trails, children solved riddles and puzzles set by a variety of 'Monsters' while counting all the pumpkins along the way. They then returned to the Visitor Centre for art activities provided by the Budding Artists group.

The event was generously sponsored by Clare businesses and residents and was supported on the day by members of local community groups including Clare Amateur Dramatic Society, Clare in Bloom, Clare Scouts and Clare Town Council.

Winners of the competitions were Ben Stone, Toby Bush and Summer Underwood.

**Hedge planting.** Keith Mison obtained 400 'whips' (free of charge) from the Woodland Trust. Our thanks go to those who helped plant them all on the morning of Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> November. (Keith never thought it would all be done in a morning but maybe that was his way of making sure everyone worked really hard!)

**Geoffrey Bray** – November 2013

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P.S. We now have over 100 people to whom we send all our newsletters by email. If you know of anyone who would like to be added to this number please ask them to let me have their details.